

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 MCT-01 HA-05 AID-05 CCO-00 FBOE-00
PM-05 H-02 INR-10 L-03 NSC-05 SP-02 OC-06 OPR-02
PA-02 USSS-00 CA-01 A-01 SCS-06 OMB-01 SS-15
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-----127342 171053Z /23

P R 171016Z MAY 78
FM AMCONSUL BELFAST
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1896
INFO AMEMBASSY DUBLIN
AMEMBASSY LONDON

UNCLAS BELFAST 81

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINS, UK
SUBJECT: NORTHERN IRELAND VIOLENCE; BOMBS NEAR CONSULATE GENERAL

1. ABOUT 8:40 LOCAL TIME THIS MORNING (MAY 17) TWO BOMBS WENT OFF IN QUICK SUCCESSION A BLOCK FROM THE CONGEN OFFICE. OUR WINDOWS RATTLED, AND PASSERSBY IN THE STREET STARTED RUNNING. THE EXPLOSIONS PRESUMABLY WERE FIRE BOMBS, SINCE A BLAZE QUICKLY DEVELOPED ON THE GROUND FLOOR ENTRANCE OF THE TELEPHONE COMPANY'S MODERN ADMINISTRATIVE BUILDING A BLOCK FROM OUR OFFICE, JUST OUTSIDE THE INNER CITY SECURITY BARRIER. POLICE AND ARMY QUICKLY CLOSED THE SECURITY GATE TO OUR BLOCK AND CORDONED OFF THE ENTIRE AREA. FIREMEN DOMINATED THE FIRE IN ABOUT 20 MINUTES, BUT IT BURNT OUT THE GROUND FLOOR OFFICES.

2. DETAILS ARE LACKING, BUT WE HAVE HEARD THERE WERE NO CASUALTIES, AND A SHORT WARNING WAS GIVEN BEFORE THE EXPLOSIONS. THE CONGEN DROVE WITHIN 100 YARDS OF THE BUILDING'S ENTRANCE ABOUT 15 MINUTES EARLIER. OTHER EMPLOYEES ARRIVED SHORTLY AFTER.

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3. COMMENT: AS FAR AS WE RECALL, THIS IS THE FIRST MAJOR BOMBING IN DOWNTOWN BELFAST SINCE THE FEBRUARY 17 LA MON DISASTER, AND THE CLOSEST ONE TO THE CONGEN SINCE DECEMBER. WE ASSUME THE PROVISIONAL IRA IS RESPONSIBLE. IN RECENT DAYS THEY HAVE MADE SEVERAL ATTACKS ON SECURITY PERSONNEL. THEY TIED UP BELFAST TRAFFIC WITH BOMB HOAXES AND ENGAGED IN SOME STREET VIOLENCE, OSTENSIBLY IN PROTEST OVER THE DEATH OF A

CATHOLIC IN A POLICE CELL. THEY ALSO BEGAN SOME SMALL BOMBINGS OF INFRASTRUCTURE INSTALLATIONS, BUT THE PRESENT BOMBING IS A CONSIDERABLE ESCALATION.

4. WE DO NOT KNOW PIRA MOTIVATION BUT NOTE TWO COINCIDENCES:

(1) IRISH FOREIGN MINISTER O'KENNEDY IS MAKING A PRIVATE VISIT TO NORTHERN IRELAND TODAY -- PIRA BOMBED SOME TELEPHONE LINES THE DAY SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NI ROY MASON VISITED O'KENNEDY IN DUBLIN.

(2) YESTERDAY BELFAST'S ALERGROVE AIRPORT FOR THE FIRST TIME IN YEARS ALLOWED RELATIVES AND FRIENDS TO SEE OFF AND MEET PASSENGERS IN THE TERMINAL -- AFTER HAVING BEEN THOROUGHLY FRISKED -- RATHER THAN HAVE TO WAIT IN A TEMPORARY LOUNGE OUTSIDE THE MAXIMUM SECURITY BARRIER.STOUT

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